

Thoughts on Wildlife Habitat in Our Parks

Some weeks back I mentioned the value of den trees (whether living or dead) as wildlife homes in our parks. I also favored leaving any dead tree standing for the benefit of wildlife if there was no potential danger to people, buildings, equipment, etc. Below are pictures of two (of many) den trees in Armco Park. The one on the left is a living tree while the one on the right has been dead for years. Both have dens suitable for housing gray and fox squirrels, woodpeckers, owls, flying squirrels, mice and other wildlife. The dead tree on the right still retains a little bit of bark as well as cracks in the wood in which beetles and other insects can live. These insects are a year-round food source for woodpeckers, nuthatches, titmice, brown creepers and other birds industrious and hungry enough to seek them out. Armco Park is not alone in having these valuable den trees. Many of our other parks have them, too. They are all a part of the park ecosystem and serve a worthwhile and necessary purpose. Even a tree which might fall into a lake or stream in our parks may be beneficial as fish structure. Taking down dead trees may give the woods a cleaner and more manicured look, but should be done with forethought and a desire to minimize the impact on wildlife and woodland habitat.



LIVING TREE



DEAD TREE

Another good practice that we employ regarding habitat in our parks is leaving patches of ground unmowed where possible. I have been pleasantly surprised to find wildflowers, some of which I have never seen before, growing in these places. For instance, the rose gentian and great lobelia were found in Armco Park this summer within a footstep of where the mower usually passes. Both plants were new to me. I have had similar experiences in our other parks. Additionally the unmowed areas provide nesting cover for birds, rabbits, mice, and more.



ROSE GENTIAN



GREAT LOBELIA

The state of Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy encourage maintaining a little wild space even at home in our yards if possible. I do it and enjoy the benefit of watching lots of interesting wildlife activity right outside my picture window.

Dave